

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 1296

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINT, GY
SUBJECT: STATUS OF GUYANA'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

SUMMARY: BURNHAM REPORTEDLY HAS SCRAPPED THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD TURN GUYANA INTO A ONE-PARTY STATE. DURING A REVIEW OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION ON JUNE 2, HE REPORTEDLY CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH GUYANA'S POLITICAL REALITIES. HE HAS APPOINTED A NEW COMMITTEE TO AMEND THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION TO PROVIDE FOR A STRONGER EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT, YET RETAIN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM. A FACTOR IN BURNHAM'S DECISION WAS PROBABLY THE BREAKDOWN OF THE "NATIONAL UNITY" TALKS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR COMMONWEALTH MEETING IN LONDON ON JUNE 4, FONMIN WILLS TOLD ME THAT THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION, WHICH HAD BEEN WRITTEN PRIMARILY BY VINCENT TEEKAH BEFORE HE WAS APPOINTED MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE, HAD BEEN DISCARDED AS NOT BEING COMPATIBLE
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WITH GUYANA'S POLITICAL REALITIES. THIS DECISION, HE SAID, HAD BEEN MADE BY PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM DURING A MEETING WITH SENIOR MINISTERS ON JUNE 2.

2. DURING THE JUNE 2 MEETING, ACCORDING TO WILLS, BURNHAM HAD CRITICIZED THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION AND HAD APPOINTED A NEW GROUP, COMPOSED OF FONMIN WILLS, MINISTER

OF ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES HUBERT JACK, MINISTER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DESMOND HOYTE, MINISTER OF HEALTH, HOUSING AND LABOR HAMILTON GREEN, ATTORNEY GENERAL MOHAMED SHAHABUDDEEN, AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE TEEKAH, TO WORK ON AMENDMENTS TO THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION. WILLS SAID THAT THE AMENDED CONSTITUTION WOULD REMAIN BASED ON THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM BUT WOULD HAVE AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT AS WELL AS A PRIME MINISTER. IT WOULD PROVIDE FOR A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM AND WOULD GUARANTEE CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE WAS ALSO TASKED WITH MAKING A RECOMMENDATION TO BURNHAM CONCERNING THE TIMING OF THE REFERENDUM TO ACCOMPLISH THE CHANGES, I.I., BEFORE OR AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

3. A COPY OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WAS GIVEN TO ME-- FOR RETURN AFTER COPYINB--BY A HIGH GOG OFFICIAL WHO ASKED THAT WE NOT REVEAL TO OTHER GUYANESE THE FACT THAT WE HAVE SEEN THE DOCUMENT. IT WOULD HAVE INCORPORATED MANY OF THE FEATURES OF A TYPICAL COMMUNIST CONSTITUTION INTO GUYANA'S POLITICS. A SEPARATE MESSAGE DESCRIBING THE DRAFT WILL BE PREPARED, AND A COPY OF THE DRAFT WILL BE POUCHED TO ARA/CAR.

4. COMMENT: WE HAVE HEARD RUMORS ABOUT THE GENERAL FEATURES OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION FOR SOME TIME. HOWEVER, IF WILLS IS CORRECT, THE DRAFT WILL BE DISCARDED AND THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE WILL RETAIN THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION AS THEIR MODEL. WE BELIEVE THAT BURNHAM'S REPORTED JUDGEMENT THAT THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN COMPATIBLE WITH GUYANA'S POLITICAL REALITIES WAS AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT. THE GUYANESE PEOPLE ARE IN NO MOOD TO VOTE FOR SUCH A CONSTITUTION IN A REFERENDUM. POSSIBLY, HAD THE NATIONAL UNITY TALKS BETWEEN BURNHAM AND CHEDDI JAGAN NOT BROKEN DOWN LAST FEBRUARY, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE FOR THEIR TWO PARTIES TO HAVE FOISTED THE NEW CONSTITUTION ON THE COUNTRY.

5. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT BURNHAM MIGHT REVIVE THE DISCARDED DRAFT OR ONE LIKE IT IN THE FUTURE SHOULD HIS POLITICAL SITUATION DETERIORATE TO THE DEGREE THAT HE WOULD AGREE TO SOME FORM OF POWER-SHARING WITH JAGAN IN A ONE PARTY STATE. AT THE PRESENT, HOWEVER, BURNHAM AND JAGAN APPEAR TO BE DRAWING FARTHER APART.
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